

Hepatitis D

What is hepatitis D?

Hepatitis D is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis D virus.

Who gets hepatitis D?

Hepatitis D occurs only in individuals who have an active hepatitis B infection or who are a hepatitis B carrier. People who are hepatitis B carriers are at increased risk of hepatitis D infection, especially if they participate in activities that put them at risk of repeated exposure to hepatitis D (such as intravenous drug abuse and unsafe sex, especially among homosexuals).

How is hepatitis D spread?

It is usually seen in individuals who have been exposed to blood or other body fluids of an infected person through contaminated needles, syringes, antihemophilic factor or sexual transmission.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis D?

The onset of symptoms is usually abrupt resembling those of hepatitis B and may be severe. It is always associated with the co-existence of hepatitis B. These symptoms may include fatigue, poor appetite, abdominal pain, vomiting and occasionally joint pain or rash. Urine may become darker in color, and jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes) may appear. Some individuals experience few or no symptoms.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The time period between exposure and onset of symptoms has not been firmly established. Symptoms occur in about two to eight weeks.

When and for how long is a person able to spread hepatitis D?

Blood is potentially infectious during all phases of acute infection. An individual is probably most infectious just prior to the onset of illness. A chronically infected person's blood may continue to be infectious.

Does past infection with hepatitis D make a person immune?

Yes.

What complications can happen from hepatitis D?

The disease may progress to chronic hepatitis. When a person has hepatitis D virus, they can convert chronic hepatitis B infection into a more severe or rapidly progressive disease. Drinking alcohol can make your liver disease worse.

What is the treatment for hepatitis D?

There are no specific medications or antibiotics that can be used to treat individuals with hepatitis D disease.

What can be done to prevent the spread of hepatitis D?

Since hepatitis D virus is dependent on hepatitis B virus to reproduce itself, prevention of hepatitis B infection will prevent hepatitis D infection. Tips for prevention against hepatitis D virus include:

- You should be vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- If you are having sex, use latex condoms correctly and every time you have sex.

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- If you are pregnant, you should get a blood test for hepatitis B. Infants born to hepatitis B virus-infected mothers should be given HBIG (hepatitis B immune globulin) and vaccine within 12 hours after birth.
- Do not “shoot” drugs. If you “shoot” drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. If you can’t stop, never share needles, syringes or “works.”
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes).
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else’s blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices.
- If you have or have had hepatitis B, do not donate blood, organs or tissues.
- Infected people should inform their dental and medical care providers so that proper precautions can be followed.
- If you are a health-care or public safety worker, get vaccinated against hepatitis B, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps.